



What's my tree worth?

Many homeowners believe that the trees in their landscape have significant economic value for use as lumber or other wood products. These trees, whether pine or hardwood, seem to occupy such a large space in the landscape that it's difficult to imagine that they can't be used to build houses, furniture or put to some other valuable use. Landowners also hope that this value will help offset the cost of the tree's removal, which can be very expensive.

The main impediment to "selling" your trees is the cost of removal. Costs paid by a tree removal company include equipment rental or loan payments, maintenance and repair costs, employee salaries and insurance, taxes and fuel costs. Additionally, the difficulty of removing a large tree in a restricted space may require special equipment and increases the time required to safely remove the tree. A tree that may have been worth a couple of hundred dollars, once it has arrived at the mill, has little dollar value once the removal company has spent a thousand dollars to take it down and transport it to the end user. Fortunately, land fill tipping fees have increased to the point that hauling trees "to the dump" has become expensive and trees that don't go to the mill are often recycled as mulch or firewood.

Homeowners trying to find buyers for pine trees may have a little better situation, but usually only if they can meet the following conditions:

- have over 60 to 70 large trees over 12" in diameter.
- the trees can be dropped to the ground in one piece without climbing them,
- a tractor trailer and heavy equipment can get into the yard to load and haul the trees,
- the contractor will not have to worry about damaging the yard, fences or out buildings.

Homeowners also have to be willing to clean up tons of branches and other debris themselves. These are very unique and often very rural situations.

Should you happen to find someone interested in removing your trees "for the wood" make sure they are bonded and insured. Require a contract specifying what work is to be done and who is responsible for damages. Pay nothing up front.

One Solution

When risk reduction is the reason for taking out a large tree, removing the tree's upper crown, leaving only the lower trunk standing, can be a stop gap measure. This phasing of tree removal can spread the cost of tree removal over a longer period of time. The trunk could remain structurally sound for some time after the branches are removed. This assumes the trunk was structurally sound prior to the removal. Also, "topping trees" (cutting back branches to stubs) is never a reasonable option as it creates long term structural issues within the tree. A technique called "crown reduction" may be an option if you wish to keep the tree in the landscape. This technique usually necessitates the hiring of a certified arborist to carry out the pruning.

Additionally, many folks on fixed incomes ask if there are public programs that can help defray the costs of the removal of trees. There are no such programs at this time.